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The Bahamas: Territorial Waters Issue and US Drug Enforcement

The Government of The Bahamas is interested in claiming an archipelagic regime -- a move that would have serious negative consequences for US maritime drug interdiction efforts in the Caribbean.

Currently, the Bahamas' territorial sea extends three nautical miles from the baselines of each island. Using the criteria set forth in the 1982 Law of the Sea (LOS) Convention, the Pindling Administration wants to create an archipelagic baseline system that would encompass all of the roughly 700 islands in the group. The area of Bahamian water both within and outside the archipelagic baseline would be greatly increased, enlarging the area under the country's sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Archipelagic status would severely restrict the US Coast Guard's access to Bahamian waters which serve as a major trans-shipment point for cocaine and marijuana entering the United States from Latin America. The Bahamian Government contends that properly identified US enforcement vessels would be permitted into the territorial sea and archipelagic waters to seize narcotics-laden craft. The archipelagic regime, however, would limit the Coast Guard's ability to conduct the important surveillance and intelligence patrols required to identify the presence of suspect ships. It would also make it more difficult for the Coast Guard to exert jurisdiction over foreign vessels found transporting illegal drugs. The Coast Guard estimates that in 1983 it seized an estimated 50-60 vessels carrying drugs within the area that would constitute The Bahamas' new territorial sea and archipelagic waters. This is a significant portion of the agency's total Caribbean interdiction effort.

According to the Bahamian Minister of External Affairs, Paul L. Adderly, the quest for an archipelagic regime will probably not be a major issue on the cabinet's agenda this year, given more urgent priorities. Nevertheless, in the long term the Bahamians appear intent on securing a change in their maritime legal status. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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UN: Regulations on Synthetic Drugs

The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs recently approved international legal controls over a number of synthetic drugs used in the manufacture of widely consumed -- and abused -- tranquilizers and sedatives. One of the more important drugs to be placed under regulation is diazepam (Valium). Although often overshadowed by the more publicized illicit natural drugs -- cannabis, cocaine, and heroin -- the abuse of man-made drugs poses an equal if not greater overall threat to world health.

Although most of the natural drugs flow from developing countries to the industrialized states, the traffic in tranquilizers and other synthetics generally moves from the richer to the poorer nations. In its recently-published 1983 annual report, the UN International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) expressed disappointment with efforts in the industrialized countries to limit the illicit production of these substances and their diversion from legitimate, recommended channels and uses. The Board noted that the task of regulating the synthetic drugs is proving as difficult as controlling the often remote and inaccessible areas where narcotic plants are cultivated.

The large-scale export of synthetics and a host of other pharmaceutical drugs to the Third World has become an important issue in North-South relations. The UN's World Health Organization has sharply criticized pharmaceutical companies in the industrialized states for taking advantage of the lack of adequate controls over drug sales and marketing in the developing countries. Many drugs that are strictly controlled or not distributed in countries with high scientific and regulation standards have been freely exported to the Third World. While the developing countries produce most of the illicit natural narcotics, Third World representatives are quick to point to the developed countries' role as the source of the synthetic and pharmaceutical drug problem. (CONFIDENTIAL)

Burma: Continuing Problems With Opium Eradication

Security problems have forced suspension of government eradication efforts in one of Burma's major opium growing regions. An intelligence source indicates that a 300-man government team was compelled to halt its eradication activities in Tangyan Township, northern Shan State when the Shan United Army (SUA) trafficking organization threatened retaliation. Last year, eradication efforts in Tangyan were hampered further when many villages bribed local eradication officials. In addition, government forces were unable to penetrate many key growing areas protected by the SUA and the Burmese Communist Party.

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This report illustrates the manifold difficulties facing Rangoon's eradication efforts. Insurgent control of major growing regions, limited government military resources, official corruption, and the rapid escalation of poppy acreage combine to minimize the effectiveness of Burmese eradication campaigns. Despite these problems, Rangoon remains committed to manual eradication methods, viewing alternative approaches -- like aerial spraying -- as impractical due to internal political constraints and to security problems.

The Burmese hope to use eradication primarily as a means of denying revenue to insurgents. Ironically, these efforts have the practical effect of pushing opium production into insurgent held areas beyond government control, thereby severely limiting the impact of government eradication efforts in more secure regions. This season's crop, in fact, is expected to be even higher than last year's yield of 500-600 tons of opium.
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